



ADVANCING RACIAL EQUITY

Analysis: Declarations of Racism as a Public Health Crisis

In 2018, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, became the first community to declare racism a public health crisis. Many communities have since done so, with the pace of adoption accelerating after the police killing of George Floyd and the protests for justice that followed, with nearly 200 declarations passing since May 2020.

As of August 2021, 209 declarations of racism as a public health crisis have passed in 37 states. These declarations were adopted by city/town councils, county boards, governor/mayoral statements, education boards (e.g., school boards), and health associations or public health departments.

While resolutions and formal statements themselves are not necessarily legally enforceable, they are an important first step in calling attention to racism and shifting the narrative in a way that can drive changes to policies, laws and resource allocation. These resolutions create the opportunity for strategic action to eliminate racist policies and practices and adopt those that advance racial equity.

Below we describe actionable steps localities have committed to and highlight robust examples of declarations and explicitly defined and locally tailored language.

Methods

We looked at 38 different strategic actions for inclusion/exclusion in the operative section of the resolutions (i.e., “resolved” clauses), across 10 categories. The 10 categories were chosen based on common themes of language used in declarations, research reports from organizations such as the National Public Health Law Network, and to reflect the social determinants of health. These findings are based on the 198 declarations with publicly available copies. Each declaration’s identifying information included the state, region and entity type (e.g., city/town council, state legislature, etc.) that passed it. Regions were designated according to the U.S. Census Bureau Regions.

Declarations by Geography

The states with the most declarations to date are California (37), Ohio (27) and Connecticut (22). At the time of this analysis, 13 states did not have any declarations, at any level. Most declarations are concentrated in the western and midwestern regions of the United States, with 49 declarations passed in western states and 79 passed in midwestern states.

Declarations by Type

Most declarations (88) were made by city or town councils, followed by health or public health entities and county boards, with each type passing a total of 43 declarations. Fourteen declarations were part of a governor or mayoral statement, and four were approved by state legislatures. Those four were the Minnesota House of Representatives, Virginia General Assembly, Hawaii State Legislature, and the Council of District of Columbia. Four declarations were made by education entities, and two were made by an entity type classified as “other.”

Declarations by Strategic Actions

The Douglas County Board of Health in Nebraska included the most actions in their declaration, with 21 total actions across six categories. Michigan was the state with the most robust state level resolution (governor directive), with 13 actions included in the directive.

Twenty-one declarations included 10 or more actions, 23 declarations included just one action, and 32 declarations included no actions beyond declaring racism as a public health crisis. Of the remaining declarations, 122 included two to nine actions.

Declarations that included more than 10 actions:

- [Douglas County Board of Health](#) (Nebraska)
- [Canton City Council](#) (Ohio)
- [Minneapolis City Council and Mayor](#) (Minnesota)
- [Cuyahoga County Council](#) (Ohio)
- [Governor Whitmer/Michigan state at large](#)
- [Stow City Council](#) (Ohio)
- [Bloomington City Council](#) (Minnesota)
- [Montgomery County Board of County Commissioners](#) (Ohio)
- [Westerville City Council](#) (Ohio)
- [Riverside City Council](#) (California)
- [Ypsilanti City Council](#) (Michigan)
- [Hennepin County Commissioners](#) (Minnesota)
- [Fayetteville City Council](#) (Arkansas)
- Kansas City Council (Missouri)⁺
- [Orange County Board of Commissioners](#) (North Carolina)
- [Milwaukee Common Council](#) (Wisconsin)

Strategic Actions

The most frequently included strategic action across all declarations was promoting an “equity in all policies” approach for all future policies and programs or committing to reviewing existing policies and programs through a racial equity lens and was included 97 times.

More than a third of the declarations committed to:

- Identifying specific activities to increase diversity and incorporate anti-racism principles across leadership, staffing or contracting;
- Forming and strengthening partnerships with community groups and organizations who are addressing racism;

- Advocating at the local, state and federal levels for policies that directly address systemic racism; and/or
- Advocating for policies that improve health for communities of color.

Below we describe the strategic actions by category. We also highlight notable examples of declarations that committed to actions that show promise to advance health and racial equity but were infrequently included in other declarations (i.e., included in 10 or less declarations).

Strategic Actions by Categories

1) Data & Accountability

Includes disaggregated data collection, analysis and reporting, oversight, responsibility, or strategies to support implementation of the resolution, such as tracking progress on the goals of the resolution and issuing reports. The four strategic actions within this category were collectively included 149 times across declarations.

Data & Accountability	Strategic Actions	Number of declarations with this action (across 198 declarations)
	Create an office/group/taskforce for the purpose of data collection on racial inequities in the community	11
	Create or support an office/group/taskforce to ensure accountability on the stated equity goals (e.g., advising the local governing body and encouraging the implementation of policies and practices that will further racial equity)	32
	Develop or improve the collection, analysis & reporting of social determinants of health) and/or racial & ethnic data (e.g., disaggregation)	49
	Issue reports to assess progress on stated goals, capitalize on opportunities to achieve racial equity, or inform meaningful action steps (e.g., strategic plan; racial equity action plan)	57

2) Community Engagement

Includes language reflecting commitments to engage actively and authentically with communities of color, working in collaboration or partnership with others working to address systemic racism or to improve health in communities of color, and working in partnership with other sectors or stakeholders. The five strategic actions within this category were collectively included 208 times across declarations.

Community Engagement	Strategic Actions	Number of declarations with this action (across 198 declarations)
	Forming and strengthening partnerships with community groups and organizations aiming to improve health for communities of color	31
	Forming and strengthening partnerships with community groups and organizations that are addressing racism	74
	Engage, collaborate with, and build the capacity of communities of color	50
	Incorporate community engagement in decision-making	34
	Encourage racial equity training for all community partners	19

3) Policies & Programs

Includes language reflecting a review of policies and procedures for the purposes of eradicating implicit and explicit racial bias and commitments to develop policies, programs and practices that build racial equity. The four strategic actions in this category were collectively included in 248 declarations, making this category the most frequently reflected across declarations.

Promoting an “equity in all policies” approach for all future policies or reviewing existing policies or programs through a racial equity lens was included most frequently across the 10 categories.

Policies & Programs	Strategic Actions	Number of declarations with this action (across 198 declarations)
	Promote an “equity in all policies” approach for all future policies and programs or commit to reviewing existing policies and programs through a racial equity lens	97
	Conduct racial impact assessment(s)	5
	Advocate at the local, state and federal levels for policies that directly address systemic racism	78
	Advocate for policies that improve health for communities of color	68

The five declarations that included an action related to racial impact assessments, which are systematic examinations of how different racial and ethnic groups will likely be affected by a proposed action or decision, were:

- [Cambridge City Council](#) (Massachusetts)

- [Bloomington City Council](#) (Minnesota)
- Kansas City Council (Missouri)⁺
- [Douglas County Board of Health](#) (Nebraska)
- [Multnomah County Board of County Commissioners](#) (Oregon)

4) Funding

Includes language that references dedicating resources and/or funding to put the commitments stated in the declarations into action. Collectively, the four strategic actions within this category were included 37 times across declarations.

	Strategic Actions	Number of declarations with this action (across 198 declarations)
Funding	Secure, commit to, or pursue funding or resources to address systemic racism/for the purpose of pursuing equity efforts	30
	Redirect funds from the police department(s) to public health or racial equity efforts	2
	Increase funding to public health departments and resources	2
	Increase funding for public spaces/recreation resources	3

The declarations by the mayor of [Everett, Massachusetts](#), and the mayor of [Sommerville, Massachusetts](#), included language reflecting reallocating funds from the police department to support public health or racial equity efforts, which shows promise for improving life outcomes for all people while reducing conflict and police violence. The [Douglas County Board of Health](#) and [Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners](#) included actions related to investing in public health departments or public health efforts.

While public spaces, such as parks and green spaces, and recreational resources provide [physical, mental and environmental benefits](#), there are inequities in accessibility and availability of public spaces and resources among communities of color. Only three declarations included an action regarding investment in these, which would improve access to and the availability of public, recreational and cultural spaces:

- [Douglas County Board of Health](#)
- [Minneapolis City Council and Mayor](#)
- [Fayetteville City Council](#)

5) Organizational Capacity/Training

Includes language related to organizational policies or practices, reflecting commitments to creating change within organizations, such as through policies related to hiring, promotion, internal policies and practices, or training for current and future employees or members. The five strategic actions within this category were collectively included 197 times.

Organizational capacity/training	Strategic Actions	Number of declarations with this action (across 198 declarations)
	Identify specific activities to increase diversity and incorporate antiracism principles across leadership, staffing, or contracting	79
	Review internal policies/practices to ensure racial equity is a core element	58
	Create position/office specifically for racial equity efforts or tracking of the goals	15
	Promote racial healing through cross-department/organization efforts (e.g., truth circles/commissions)	2
	Require or improve existing racial equity training for all government employees (e.g., implicit bias training)	43

Promoting racial healing through cross-department or organization efforts (e.g., truth circles/commissions) can help us understand how policies, practices and actions may have caused harm and can also help repair relationships, reduce prejudice, challenge preconceptions and increase compassion and empathy. [Minneapolis City Council](#) (Minnesota) and [Fayetteville City Council](#) (Arkansas) were the only declarations to include an action related to racial healing, specifically to build a workplace culture that promotes racialized repair and cross-cultural relationships.

Strategic Actions by Social Determinants of Health

Below we describe, by category, strategic actions to address the social determinants of health. Actions pertaining to reparations, the improvement of public transportation and living wages or guaranteed income were each only included in one declaration. None of the declarations included an action about rezoning for the purpose of school attendance and diversity.

6) Economic Development

Includes language related to promoting and developing racially equitable economic and workforce opportunities and promoting economic mobility and stability. The three strategic actions within this category were collectively included 16 times across declarations.

Strategic Actions		Number of declarations with this action (across 198 declarations)
Economic Opportunities	Promote racially equitable economic and workforce development practices	14
	Call for the study of reparations or support action on providing reparations	1
	Commit to or advocate for living wages/guaranteed income	1

[Louisville, Kentucky](#) had the only declaration to include an action related to reparations, which in addition to acknowledging historic injustices, shows promise for improving health and racial equity by closing the racial wealth gap or investing in initiatives that address wealth and opportunity gaps. Louisville also was the only declaration to include an action related to living wages — specifically to promote an increase in the minimum wage — which lifts individuals out of poverty and increases their ability to spend earnings on basic needs or services to protect their health.

7) Education

Includes language referencing school policies and environment that promote diversity, an inclusive education, safe school environments, and support children of color. The six strategic actions included within this category were collectively included in 16 declarations.

Strategic Actions		Number of declarations with this action (across 198 declarations)
Education	Rezoning for the purpose of school attendance and diversity	0
	Increase or allocate funding/resources to school districts or for youth development	2
	Revise the historical accuracy and language included in curricula	4
	Recruit and develop teachers and staff to increase diversity and inclusion/reflect diversity of students	3
	Promote policies and curricula that educate children about the harms of historical oppression and the value of equality and inclusion	4
	School discipline reform or removal of use of police within schools	3

The mayor of [Louisville, Kentucky](#), and the [Minneapolis City Council](#) passed declarations that included commitments related to funding for school districts or for youth programs. Four declarations passed by a school board or committee included revisions to curricula:

- [Decatur Public School District #61 Board of Education](#) (Illinois)
- [Champaign School Board](#) (Illinois)
- [Lowell School Committee](#) (Massachusetts)
- [Ferndale School Board](#) (Michigan)

The [Decatur Public School District #61 Board of Education](#), [Champaign School Board](#) and [Lowell School Committee](#) included a commitment to the recruitment and development of diverse teachers and staff. The four declarations that included actions pertaining to educating children about the harms of historical oppression were:

- [Decatur Public School District #61 Board of Education](#) (Illinois)
- [Champaign School Board](#) (Illinois)
- [West Haven City Council](#) (Connecticut)
- [Hamilton County Board of Commissioners](#) (Ohio)

Three declarations included commitment to a revised discipline and safety system that protects the physical, mental and social health of students and staff through a culturally responsive, restorative justice model. A restorative justice approach has been shown to reverse the negative consequences of exclusionary disciplinary practices, increase school connectedness, and establish a healthier school climate. The three declarations to include school discipline reform were:

- [Decatur Public School District #61 Board of Education](#) (Illinois)
- [Champaign School Board](#) (Illinois)
- [Ventura City Council](#) (California)

8) Housing, basic amenities and the environment

Includes language related to affordable, stable and quality housing, access to reliable transportation, reduction of racial segregation, investments to improve neighborhood/community development, and access to healthy food. The three strategic actions within this category were collectively included in 10 declarations.

	Strategic Actions	Number of declarations with this action (across 198 declarations)
Housing, basic amenities and the environment	Commit to address safe, affordable housing opportunities in minority communities (e.g., inclusionary zoning)	6
	Improve access to community resources in lower income or minority communities (food access; community programming or resources)	3
	Improvement of public transportation	1

The [link between health and housing](#) is a result of influences from both the individual home unit and neighborhood factors, such as access to healthy food, with communities of color experiencing greater risk for mental and physical health issues as a result of their housing and neighborhood conditions. The five declarations that included an action to address safe and affordable housing were:

- [Fayetteville City Council](#) (Arkansas)
- [San Antonio City Council](#) (Texas)
- [Minneapolis City Council and Mayor](#) (Minnesota)
- [Montgomery County Board of County Commissioners](#) (Ohio)
- [Peoria County Board of Health](#) (Illinois)
- [Louisville Mayor](#) (Kentucky)

The two declarations that included an action to improve or increase access to community resources and amenities were:

- [Minneapolis City Council and Mayor](#) (Minnesota)
- [Montgomery County Board of County Commissioners](#) (Ohio)

[Poor transportation decisions can harm health](#) and are not always fair across all communities, yet only one of the declarations included an action to address this. The city of [San Antonio, Texas](#), committed to improving city services that strengthen historically marginalized communities in place and promoting racially equitable city services, programs and policies, including transportation.

9) Public Safety/Policing

Includes language referencing public safety and policing reforms, review and revision of criminal justice policies, procedures and practices, and accountability measures. The three strategic actions within this category were collectively included in 11 declarations.

Strategic Actions		Number of declarations with this action (across 198 declarations)
Public Safety/Policing	Establish external/civilian police oversight system or advisory committee	5
	Support ban on use of choke holds and other forms of excessive force on individuals as an acceptable practice for police officers	3
	Require implicit bias or antiracism training within police departments	3

These actions related to police reform and improving public safety can increase community engagement and reduce negative health outcomes in communities that are over — and lethally

— policed. The creation of an external police oversight system or advisory committee as an accountability measure was explicitly included in the following declarations:

- [Holyoke Mayor](#) (Massachusetts); has since been rescinded by current Mayor Murphy.
- [Somerville Mayor](#) (Massachusetts)
- [Everett Mayor](#) (Massachusetts)
- Springfield City Mayor (Massachusetts)⁺
- [Snohomish County Board of Health](#) (Washington)

Reforms to reduce use of force and bans on excessive force, which result in fewer police killings, were included in three declarations:

- [Fayetteville City Council](#) (Arkansas)
- [Ypsilanti City Council](#) (Michigan)
- [Long Beach City Council](#) (California)

Reforms in training that include addressing unconscious or implicit racial biases were included in the following three declarations:

- [Somerville Mayor](#) (Massachusetts)
- [Snohomish County Board of Health](#) (Washington)
- [Hamilton County Board of Commissioners](#) (Ohio)

10) Health & COVID

Includes language reflecting a specific focus on addressing COVID-19 health disparities. We looked at analysis of COVID-19 data as the strategic action within this category, and language reflecting this was included in 10 declarations.

Strategic Action		Number of declarations with this action (across 198 declarations)
COVID-19	Analysis of COVID-19 data	10

Examples of strong language in declarations

Exemplary strategic actions included in declarations were those that were explicitly defined, indicated an understanding of how the actions would address racism, provided details on how they would be implemented, and were tailored to their local context rather than following a template seemingly without further contemplation. Below are examples of declarations with specific and strong actions, organized by category.

1) Data & Accountability

[Glastonbury Town Council](#) (Connecticut) committed to appointing a Commission on Racial Justice and Equity, detailing who would comprise the commission, their purpose, and how they would collect information and communicate findings of a public survey on racism and resident experiences. Glastonbury Town Council also included a deadline for reporting findings and recommendations.

2) Community Engagement

[Hamilton County Board of Commissioners](#) (Ohio) named specific partners in their commitment to support and promote collaborative health efforts and included the reason for doing so.

3) Policies & Programs

[Mayor Walsh](#) (Boston) included in Boston's declaration the purpose of developing equitable policy and practice solutions and named some of the strategies that would be used to develop equitable policies and practices. In [Douglas County Board of Health's](#) (Nebraska) commitment to a routine health and racial equity impact assessments, the purpose of the assessment was clear and explicit ("help leaders understand the racial equity implications to existing and/or new policy, programs and/or institutional practices").

4) Funding

[Minneapolis City Council and Mayor](#) (Minnesota) specified what the allocated dollars in the mayor's budget would be directed toward, with the purpose of reversing and repairing the harm experienced by BIPOC.

5) Organizational Capacity/Training

[Boulder County Board of Commissioners and Board of Health](#) (Colorado) identified the specific training (Courageous Conversations about Race, or CCAR, training) that would be used for all county employees.

6) Economic Development

[Mayor Fischer's](#) (Louisville, Kentucky) commitment to building Black wealth included specific mechanisms for doing so through entrepreneurship and home ownership supports, promoting an increase in minimum wage and advocating for Congressional action on reparations.

7) Education

[West Haven City Council](#) (Connecticut) specifically named the Board of Education to collaborate with on a balanced and anti-racism curriculum and included an explanation of what an anti-racism curriculum includes and teaches

8) Housing, basic amenities and the environment

To address racial and income segregation, the [San Antonio City Council](#) (Texas) committed to mitigating housing and job displacement and included examples of strategic initiatives to work toward this and explicitly named historically marginalized communities as those that improved city services should support.

9) Public Safety/Policing

[Ypsilanti City Council](#) (Michigan) explicitly declared zero tolerance for police brutality by the City Police Department.

10) Health & COVID-19

[Bloomington City Council's](#) (Minnesota) call to action for COVID-19 explicitly acknowledges the need to mitigate its exacerbation of racial inequities.

**Not available online*

The included data is not automatically updated to reflect live updates but will be updated frequently to reflect newly passed declarations.